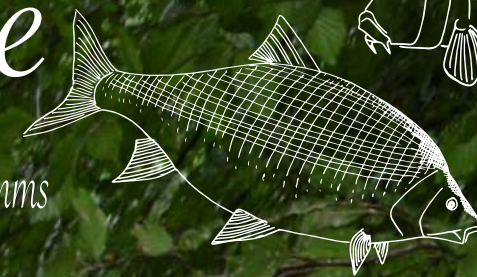


The Hampshire Avon

with Sean Simms



Meandering gently through the Southern countryside, don't be fooled by the soft bends and weary willows that line this seemingly quiet river - the Hampshire Avon is home to a veritable smorgasbord of rod-bending beasts pushing the boundaries of river fishing to their very limit. With miles of river to choose from and a plethora of mouth-watering swims, this

venue offers the angler a magical combination of beautiful riverscapes and a roll of the dice on what fish might pick up your bait and give you the battle of a lifetime.

After an extensive amount of research on the hottest and most prolific areas, there was one location that stood out for this feature article. Offering a private stretch of river, (comprising five spacious swims

tucked away on the edge of a small fenced-off forest) with absolutely stunning riverside accommodation, the venue had photographic evidence of some huge fish taken over the years, thus begging a late-August visit to see if those specimens would show. Armed and ready with some heavy gear and a bag packed with bait, it was time to let the tantalising riparian activities commence...

Having spent the previous evening eyeing up the swims and deciding where to set the traps, the next stage was to decide which baits to use, feeding patterns, and the planned presentation of the baits to pluck a prize-catch from this stunning body of water. As you may have heard in the mainstream angling press, many larger river species like carp, barbel, chub, and bream enjoy halibut flavouring. In recent years this flavouring has been presented as flavoured pellets which has proven incredibly effective - now we have moved on a step further by offering halibut in boilie format and as a highly concentrated liquid attracter. In the list detailed below you will see that the choice of bait is completely reliant on the fish going crazy for halibut. Often

keeping things uniform and simple on the bank is a great way to keep things simple under water, avoiding confusion amongst feeding fish. The best way to explain this approach is by imagining yourself going fishing with a wide variety of baits, then dividing the numbers of hours fished by the number of baits used on the hook... perhaps you only had half an hour on the right bait? In some cases this is just not long enough. The key when trying to improve catch-rates is to reduce time spent on ineffective offerings and spend as long as you can on the right bait, getting the fish feeding confidently and giving you the best chance of catching your quarry. Fishing is all about building the confidence of the fish, but equally about building your own confidence

so that you believe in your own baits and be positive that if you manage to bring a fish to the area, that your hookbait will be the one that gets scooped by that weighty specimen. Matching flavours and keeping them uniform avoids confusing the fish, so if wanting the fish to feed on halibut, (which is the chosen hookbait on this occasion) then why risk offering the fish several options and have to guess which one they are feeding on most confidently? The best way to attack the river on this occasion was PVA bagging the smaller pellets and boilies (to keep the bait in a nice tight area) and using the larger drilled baits and boilies on the hook, doused in the halibut attractors for that extra-special fish-enticing wow-factor.

BAIT LIST:

- 1kg 4mm halibut pellet (cylinders)
- 1kg 6mm halibut pellet (cylinders)
- 1kg 8mm halibut pellet (cylinders)
- 2kg 15mm halibut boilies
- 22/15/11mm drilled halibut pellets
- 250ml bottle of halibut flavouring
- 250ml bottle of halibut bait glug
- 100ml concentrated halibut liquid

HALIBUT FLAVOUR PELLET AND BOILIES



THE
BAIT

Gripper lead: As you can see, this lead has small protruding nodes that enable the lead to grip the gravel bottom to stop the rig from rolling into a snag. It is also covered in sand to disguise it from the fish

Rubber stop: To protect the knot against the swivel, avoiding weak points on the cast or when playing big fish

Sinking tubing: Made from dense tungsten so it nails the first foot of main line to the deck - also a nice gravel colour to make it invisible to the fish

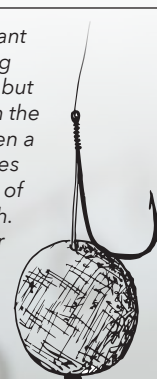
Rubber boom: Keeps the rig straight on the cast to avoid tangles

Helicopter rig: Enables unlimited spin on the hooklength, avoiding tangles (make sure tubing is longer than hooklength to make your rig tangle-proof)

Hair and stop: The hook is tied with a knotless knot with a hair long enough for a bait and a small plastic stop

Rubber bead: Holds the tubing in place but will slide if under pressure making this a fish-friendly rig if the mainline should break

Hookbait tip: It is important when creating your hair rig that the bait hangs freely, but is still (just) in contact with the curve of your hook so when a fish sucks in the bait it gives the point the best chance of setting in the lip of the fish. Additionally, to make your hookbait stand out from the other offerings, try coating it in a highly scented halibut dip or glug just before the cast

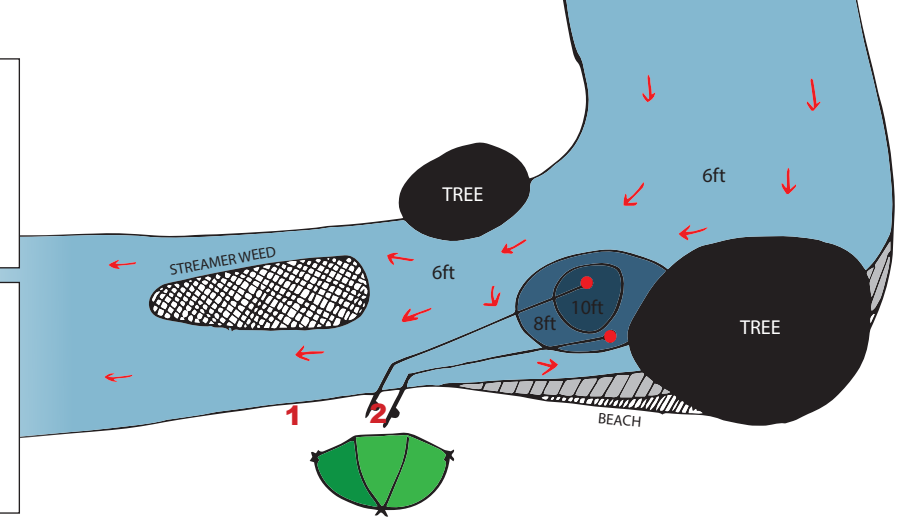


THE
RIG

SWIM

ROD 1. For most river fishing swims you should find the deepest spot and consider placing a bait in that location, as this is often a natural hideaway for bigger fish. One target species was carp, so the 10ft hole was the first choice.

ROD 2. Due to the right-angled corner in this swim, the flow was forced back on itself creating a nice eddy. Choosing to drop this halfway down the slope close to the tree was a good idea as the underwater roots make a great home for large carp and barbel.



The day had barley broken but the rods were already set and primed for a take in swim one. As you can see from the sketch above, tactics were twofold, targeting carp in the deepest part of the river and placing bait close to the an overhanging tree (which wherever you are fishing often acts as a regular holder of fish, giving the angler an early advantage). The theory behind selecting this swim was firstly because of the bend and the huge eddy created by the flow, and secondly for the noticeably deep hole close to the tree. The swim was also the furthest point at the top of the stretch so if choosing a different swim the following day downstream, the scent trail pulling the fish upstream

would not cause the fish to stop at the day one bait.

In the first few silent hours of August daylight some decent fish were turning regularly in the flow over on the far bank. Often in fishing when you see fish surfacing it's a natural reaction to want to drop your tactics and chase those fish. Although in some cases this can be very effective, decisions on rivers need plenty of thought as a poor one can ultimately ruin a swim. The idea of moving the baits to a new area after spending so much time choosing the two locations for the rods (and laying a decent bed of bait out there) was not a wise one, and fortunately as the day got lighter it was clear that the fish surfacing

were in fact trout taking the morning hatch.

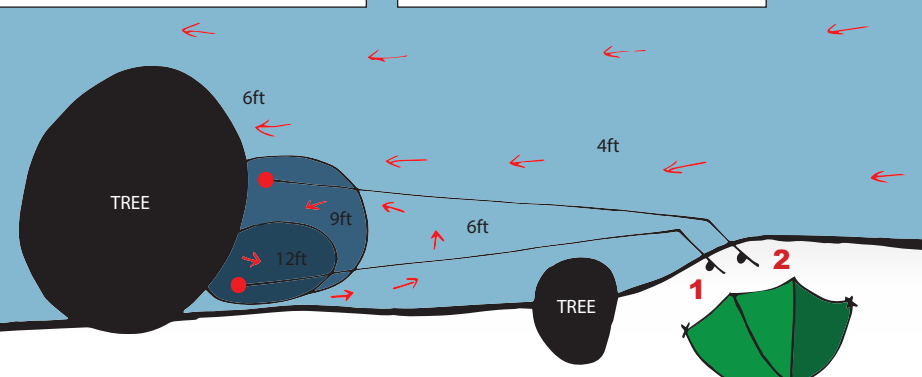
Many hours later, the trout stopped splashing and that was the end of all action in the swim. With darkness descending day one drew to a close and the alarms had not sounded a single beep. It was a frustrating day, but the key with river fishing is to never give up. Clearly the carp in the river were nomadic and finding them was to be a large factor in the pursuit of success. As mentioned above, angling is all about making decisions and unfortunately on this occasion staying put in one swim was not the right path to follow. It was time for a move downstream for day two to try and tempt that memorable fish.

"It was a frustrating day, but the key with river fishing is to never give up."

2 SWIM

ROD 1. The same attack as rod one in swim one, the deep hole was the ideal location for targeting a big fish. The benefit of a back eddy ensured that all of the loose feed would stay in the right place and presentation would be good.

ROD 2. This rod was placed on the crease (just out of the shallows) running into deeper water under the tree. The spot was tipped to produce a mixture of chub and barbel as often they like to hang around off the main flow.



Day two and the chosen swim was very different; the flow here was much stronger for most part and shallower areas provided visible gravel bars for the fish to feed over. Not forgetting the big fish tactics from day one, rod one was again set in the deepest point of the swim in an eddy. Rod two however was placed on the edge of the main flow with a view to target the barbel and chub rather than the carp that tend to reside in the slower, deeper water.

Only half an hour had passed and rod two ripped away with vigour. Unfortunately there was no connection with a fish on the strike which raised doubts about the rig presentation. The decision was made to increase the hooklength from six inches to two feet so that the lead and tubing was further away from the feeding fish - hopefully making them less wary and more likely to take the bait confidently. After the swim had settled for an hour or so there was another knock at the end of the rod. The twitching continued for several

minutes which roused suspicions of a barbel nosing the bait; often deep in the summer the barbel get very wary in the bright daylight and spend a considerable amount of time checking the bait but not taking it properly, which in turn causes frustrating twitching and vibration of the rod. Fortunately the twitching turned into an alarm screaming and the newly altered hooklength appeared to have been the right change at the right time. The rod was picked up a decent weight twas finally pulling at the other end. After a tough battle fought in the faster flow of the shallow water, the fish was finally landed; not a barbel as first anticipated, but a chub of just under four and a half pounds registered on the scales. Over the next three hours this process repeated itself three more times with fish ranging between three and four pounds taken on a halibut boilie fished over a bed of small pellets. Four fish falling foul to the same rod was no coincidence, proving that the tactical rig change

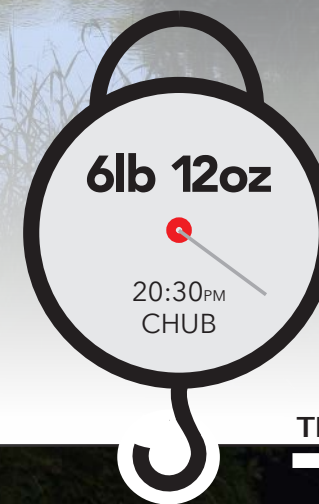
had paid dividends to the catch-rate.

Over the next few hours the fishing tailed off and the bites dried up. This can often be the case when the sun is highest in the sky as at this time the fish are usually tucked away in quiet spots not feeding until the light fades and the open water is a more desirable place to start eating again. Unfortunately rod one had not produced again and the bid to catch a huge specimen carp seemed to be fading away. The thing to remember with river carp is that they are clever fish and when they get to a larger size it means they are wise to almost everything the river can throw at them. Survival of the fittest is a fitting term here, and it is said that some large river carp will never be taken on a bait with a hook in it due to a combination of their cautious nature and the abundance of natural food on offer that the river delivers with its eternal flow.

As the heat of the afternoon sun rescinded and cloud-coverage filled the sky, the night was drawing ever-closer and it was the final chance to catch a big fish. At around eight-thirty pm the trusted rod two whipped around and an at the alarm lit up like a firefly hovering over the rod in the fog-ridden night sky. The fish was firmly hooked but in a completely different league to the others, pulling line off the spool and hanging deep with hard lunges thrown at the rod, one after another. The prediction was a decent barbel (taken on the boilie again) that would certainly finish the session, and trip, on a high. Several minutes later a meaty silver head appeared at the surface and before the fish had time to realise where it was the net was underneath it and a lifetime goal had been achieved. That

magical fishing time, just after dark, was key to the success of the capture - the dinner bell rang for this colossal chub that registered on the scales at a whopping six pounds and twelve ounces.

A new personal best generously posed for the crocking picture below, and the Hampshire Avon proved once again that it is home to some of the best specimen river fishing in the country in some of the most beautiful locations to cast a rod and line.



THE
PHOTO

'That magical fishing time, just after dark, was key to the success of the capture - the dinner bell rang for this colossal chub'

